8: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1951) 1971 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

Meanwhile, Roman Catholic missionaries, denied access to the reservation by the fact that it had been officially designated Methodist territory, traveled with the Blackfoot hunting bands and performed baptisms and marriages among them. In 1881, Father Prando built a small chapel on the south side of Birch Creek. The Indians could go to him, but he was forbidden to cross the river to pursue his work on the reservation. By that time some of the Piegan bands had settled on Birch Creek near this mission station and had become ardent followers of this priest. When, in the fall of 1883, a senatorial investigating committee visited the reservation, it found that head chief White Calf's principal complaint against Agent Young was his refusal to allow the Jesuits on the reservation.[14]

By 1878 top-level Indian Bureau administrators were convinced that the civilization of the Indians could be brought about more speedily through the education of their children than by any other means. On the Blackfeet Reservation in the late seventies they had little opportunity to prove their theory. The great majority of the Indian families spent too little time near the agency. When they were near by, the school was crowded. When they folded their lodges and went on a buffalo hunt, the children went with them, even though a few ran away from their families and returned to school. Of the twelve hundred Indian children of school age in 1878, only twenty boys and thirty girls attended school for more than one month, and only two children learned to read and write during the year.[15]

Both children and adults were reluctant to speak the English words they knew, fearing that they would be laughed at if they mispronounced any of them. At the same time, the Indians laughed loudly at the crude and halting efforts of the whites employed at the agency to speak Blackfoot.[16]

The investigating committee in 1883 found that the school teachers, the Misses Young, daughters of the agent, were "most

[15] *Ibid.*, 1877, 132; 1879, 91.
[14] Bischoff, *Jesuits in Old Oregon*, 90–91, 100.
[15] Reports of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, 1878, xxiv, 83, 288–89.
[16] *Ibid.*, 1877, 131.

8: Ewers E,G-4,5 (1941-1951) 1971 NF6 Blackfoot NF6

estimable and energetic young ladies, but the school is doing very little in the education of the Indian children." On ration days as many as two hundred children attended; on other days, no more than fifty. Chief White Calf also complained that this school "amounted to nothing."[17]

Following the decision in 1877 of the Northern Blackfeet, Bloods, and North Piegans to swear allegiance to The Great Mother and to receive land in Canada under the terms of Treaty No. 7, only eleven bands among all the Indians known by the general designation of Blackfeet remained as wards of the United States. It was not surprising that Agent Young observed that the Indians on his reservation were "now calling themselves by the general name Piegan" in 1878. They were members of Piegan bands. Yet the official estimate of seventy-five hundred Indians on the Montana reservation at that time was excessively high. It must have included a large number of Canadian Indians who had crossed the "medicine line" to get in on the distribution of annuities from "The Great White Father." For nearly two decades thereafter the problem of determining on which side of the line some of these Indians belonged was a perplexing one for both governments, and especially for their agents in the field. Meanwhile, many clever Indians managed to move back and forth across the line to get in on rations and payments issued by both the United States and Canada. My elderly Piegan informants told me they had no trouble getting a share of the Canadians' bounty prior to the middle eighties. The problem was complicated by the common practice of intermarriage between the several Blackfoot tribes. It was not until the middle nineties that definite reservation assignments were made for some individuals by agreement between their agents in the United States and Canada. In the meantime, the population figures for the Blackfoot tribes in both Canada and the United States were

[17] *Report of the Subcommittee of the Special Committee of the United States Senate Appointed to Visit the Indian Tribes of Northern Montana*, 48 Cong., 1 sess., *Senate Report No. 283*, 233-34. (Hereafter referred to as *Subcommittee Report*, 48 Cong., 1 sess., *Senate Report* 283.)

122 and white-painted log structure about half-way to town. Met one of
[126] the teachers, Mrs. Eagle Feather, and she was very nice. A young
[875] Indian man was attempting to repair one of the swings on the playground. I loaned him a pair of pliers, and darn if the ingrate didn't try to make off with them. I am so simpatico with the Indian personality that I have difficulty in remembering that I am still dealing with individuals, and it is always an inordinate disappointment when I meet a rascally Indian. Jim says that there is an element on the Reservation which regards thievery lightly and which will make off with anything not bolted down. Isn't there everywhere, though!

I found the Chief standing on a street corner with "Popeye," the gawky drunk I met in the bar that first night. I thought they were together, so when Popeye asked if he could go along with the Chief and I as we searched for Jim, I said O.K. But when Popeye got into the car, the Chief angrily got out again, declaring that he would not ride with that *"aú-wah-tsahps'"* (screwball). So I told Popeye to get out, and the Chief and I drove to the garage to which Jim had taken his car for repairs. Several Indian tykes were at play near
[524] the garage. They were all under five, and all of them, both boys and girls, had braids. They had bows and arrows and feathered coup-sticks and were playing at Indian warfare.

122 The three of us went to the Tribal Office, where the Tribal Coun-
643 cil meeting was to be held in a large meeting-room. There are thirteen Council members, elected every two years, with an executive committee composed of the Chairman, the Vice-chairman, and the Secretary. In past years, the Council was unpaid, but starting with this year the members are salaried.

The Chairman ("Sherman," Jimmy calls it) was absent, the meeting being presided over by the vice-sherman. Most of the participants sat around a seminar table, but two men sat back against the wall. One of these was a White man who apparently functioned in an advisory capacity. He was middle-aged, bespectacled, and a chain-smoker, making intelligent, articulate comments with a cigarette dangling from his mouth. At the table was one very attractive Indian girl, taking notes. I am kind of hungry for some female company, and I guess I must have stared at her—with prurient arch of eyebrow and twirl of moustache, if I know me—because eventually, in typical White-girl fashion, she fiddled with her hair until I got a good look at her ring.

Dad and I, along with about fifty other observers, mostly older Indians, sat on wooden benches at one end of the room. Jim sat

Late in the evening of that same day there was a hard, brief thunderstorm, with much lightning. [Anyone who has seen lightning on the High Plains of Montana has no difficulty in understanding why the Blackfoots regarded it as a supernatural expression; it is lightning totally different from any I have seen elsewhere.] When it was over, the Thunder Medicine Man came again to my father's lodge.

My father said, "I am sorry. I have done my best, but my arms are not long enough. ["My arms are not long enough," is the literal translation of a Blackfoot phrase which is intended to suggest something like, "my influence is not broad enough," or, "my authority is not strong enough."] The people will not camp together, and the Holy Woman will not allow the lodge to be moved."

The Thunder Medicine Man said, "I am sorry to hear this. The Medicine Lodge is not in a good place. Thunder is not happy with the way the people are conducting themselves. Misfortune will come to them."

At that time there were several Piegan children attending the Indian school down at Fort Shaw. Among them were my wife's younger brother, one of Yellow Wolf's sons, and the son of my brother, Cross Guns. I was asked to go down and bring the children home for summer vacation, so I left the next day for Fort Shaw. The journey to Fort Shaw could not be made in a single day, and as I camped that first night north of Depuyer I was waked by another violent thunderstorm. I had no way of knowing it at the time, but when I got back home I learned that upon that night the Medicine Lodge at Old Agency had been struck by lightning. No one but the Holy Woman had been killed. The Holy Woman had been killed by a bolt of lightning. [As though it were not enough that this incident is a verifiable historical fact, some years later, when the daughter of this Holy Woman sponsored a Medicine Lodge, she too was struck and killed by lightning. Once again, the Holy Woman was the only one to die.]

I was delayed at Fort Shaw for two days because upon arriving there I discovered that Cross Guns' boy had broken his hip in falling from a horse. The Superintendent of the Indian School, a man named Campbell, refused to send the boy to the hospital, and in order to borrow a buggy in which to take the youngster home I had to go all the way back to Choteau. Campbell also did not wish to allow one of the girls to go home,

159 484 752 657 875 [128] so I lied to him. I told him that the girl's father had died and the girl was his only heir and that it would be necessary for her to return home for the property settlement. I told him that a lawyer had told me to bring her home, and when I said this, Campbell not only let her go but insisted upon giving us rations. He also gave us eight pillows with which to make Cross Guns' boy comfortable in the buggy. [I researched this portion of the narrative with great thoroughness, and positively established as facts the following: (1) Cross Guns' boy did break his hip in a fall from a horse; (2) The Chief was forced to transport the boy by buggy all the way from Fort Shaw to his home near Browning (a distance of well over one hundred miles!); (3) F. C. Campbell, the superintendent of the Indian school at Fort Shaw, later became both Supervisor of Indian Industries for the States of Montana, North Dakota, Wyoming and Idaho *and* Superintendent of the Blackfoot Indian Reservation, and although Campbell managed by hook or crook to remain in the Indian Service for 39 years, his conduct was such that at long last, on July 24, 1929, F. C. Campbell became the subject of a special investigation by the Committee on Indian Affairs of the United States Senate.]

159 484 752 [273] Cross Guns' boy had to lie on his back in the bed of the wagon, and since it would have been inhuman to force him to travel in the daytime, with the sun in his face, we traveled at night, by moonlight. We had no medicine to give the boy, but at Choteau I had gotten hold of some whiskey and we gave this to the boy to ease his pain. We dosed him with whiskey until he passed out.

159 484 752 132 North of Choteau, on a bright, moonlit night, with every star clear in the sky, we were traveling along when suddenly lightning began to flash. Drags His Robe, Heavy Breast and some other old-timers were traveling with me at the time, and none of us could figure out the reason for this sudden advent of fierce lightning flashes. We stopped and took shelter, but although the lightning continued until dawn, not a drop of rain fell and not a cloud darkened the bright full moon. It was the strangest thing I had ever experienced, and I assure you that the boy was not the only one to take a shot of whiskey that night.

At Depuyer we got some more bootleg whiskey for the boy, and finally we all made it back home. The first thing I noticed upon arrival was that the Medicine Lodge had been torn down, and the first person I encountered, a lady named Goods Steal-

159 346 165 793